

THE CENSUS REVEALS ANOTHER POST-KATRINA LOSS: OUR POPULATION OF CHILDREN

POPULATION DROP *in the seven-parish
New Orleans area
between 2000 and 2010*

OVERALL

11%

CHILDREN

23%



MICHAEL DEMOCKER / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

Kindergarten students get ready to learn Feb. 1 at KIPP: Central City, New Orleans, which had 29 percent fewer residents in 2010 than in 2000, saw its population of children drop 43 percent in the same period.

FEWER KIDS NOW MEANS FEWER TAXPAYERS IN YEARS TO COME

By Michelle Krupa
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TP FEB 10 2011

THE near-universal absence of children across the New Orleans area in the months after Hurricane Katrina was among the most stark and ominous indicators of the storm's destruction. And although the numbers have rebounded since the days of vacant playgrounds

and silent schoolyards, the proportion of kids across the region still fell sharply in the decade ending last year, new census data show.

While the overall tally of residents in the seven-parish New Orleans area dropped 11 percent between 2000 and 2010, the population of people younger than 18 fell at twice that rate, plummeting more than 22 percent from more than 351,000 youngsters at the turn of the 21st century to about 273,000 last year.

Children comprised about 23 percent of the region's total population in 2010, down from nearly 27 percent a decade earlier, the data show.

Hard-hit St. Bernard Parish saw the most drastic loss, with the number of kids dropping 46 percent over the decade. But there, the reduction aligned almost exactly with the overall loss of residents.

See **CHILDREN**, A-4

FEWER CHILDREN

Parishes hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina saw steep declines in the number of children between 2000 and 2010, new census data show.

| | Jefferson | Orleans | Plaquemines | St. Bernard | St. Charles | St. John | St. Tammany | Region |
|--|-----------|---------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-------------|--------|
| Overall population change, 2000 to 2010 | -5.0% | -29.1% | -13.9% | -46.6% | 9.8% | 6.7% | 22.2% | -11.3% |
| Change in population of children younger than 18 | -15.5% | -43.4% | -19.0% | -45.9% | -2.5% | -8.0% | 10.5% | -22.5% |

Source: U.S. Census

THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

Storm evacuees with children seen as less likely to return

CHILDREN, from A-1

Elsewhere, the ranks of children dwindled far faster than the overall population. New Orleans, which was home to 29 percent fewer residents in 2010 than in 2000, saw its population of children drop 43 percent over the same period.

Jefferson and Plaquemines parishes experienced a similar trend.

Even in St. Charles and St. John the Baptist parishes, where overall populations grew during the decade, the total number of children decreased. Only in St. Tammany Parish did the number of kids increase over the decade, although only at about half the rate of the overall population.

Long-lasting impact

Having fewer children in a community can have a long-lasting impact, experts said.

"It's simple demographics," said Teresa Falgoust of the local advocacy group Agenda for Children. "Children are quite literally the future, and if you don't have a steadily growing child population, your population for the long term is going to continue to decline."

That would leave a smaller base of taxpayers to support government services, particularly infrastructure such as roads and utility lines that must be maintained regardless of population density, she said.

"As long as our population continues to decline, it's going to be harder and harder to meet those basic needs," Falgoust said.

Post-catastrophe risks

Though not tracked by the Census Bureau, the reasons for the decline in the childhood population almost certainly traces to Katrina, observers said.

"Families were arguably more likely to set down roots elsewhere because of the complexity and sensitivity of raising children in a post-catastrophe environment," Tulane University geographer Richard Campanella said, noting the devastation wrought to local school and health care systems.

"Singles and couples without children are more flexible and more resilient to those sort of circumstances," he said.

Children also are more likely than people of any other age group to live in poverty, making them most susceptible to financial hurdles that hindered the return of evacuees, including elevated rental costs, Falgoust said.

A dearth of child-care options shortly after the storm limited parents' ability to return, she said, noting that the number of child-care centers across the

region has rebounded to 74 percent of the pre-storm level.

And because Katrina broke up families, many parents and grandparents no longer were able to provide child care for free.

Children also influenced their families' decisions not to return after the storm, especially those who landed in more modern schools with superior educational and recreational programs, said Mary Joseph, director of the Children's Defense Fund's Katrina Resource and Referral Project.

"Once they got settled in communities, it was hard to uproot and to move back," she said.

A scarcity of jobs, the shuttering of several large public housing developments and the lack of government assistance to defray the cost of moving home also hindered families with children, she said.

Laying the foundation

"Not having as many children as we had before certainly kind of makes us feel somewhat sad as a city because we were not doing

well by our children," Joseph said, though she quickly added that the post-Katrina wave of civic activism has laid a foundation for improving conditions that affect children.

"There is high energy around education, around (curbing) violence in the community," she said. "We haven't conquered it, but we're out there fighting. The lethargy that we had toward these issues before is gone, and for this moment, there seems to be energy."

To lure back children — and their families — officials must "make some serious investments in a child-friendly city," Falgoust said. Factors include offering high-quality child care, competitive schools and top-notch playgrounds and recreational programs.

"These are the same things we talk about when we talk about attracting businesses to the region," she said. "They also attract parents."

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